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THE MERGING OF INSTITUTIONS: CONTEXTUAL DECISIONS AND TEACHER TRAINING

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With the Fraser's razors in operation and the impending collapse of numerous College's of Advanced Education as independent autonomous institutions and the unitary vision of the Correy Committee on a teacher training style for New South Wales, certain cautionary warnings should be uttered concerning the direction that teacher training could take if such stupidity is allowed to go unchallenged. The necessity for such warnings is fairly obvious: (1) there may exist in the shuffle for compliance a built in bias towards rigidity in teacher training; (2) political expediency or economy may become confused as good common sense; (3) educational principles might become further subverted in the guise of administrative efficiency.

This paper will examine some of the elements of the teacher training arena, e.g., models of teacher training, decision making and dilemma resolution in the hope that debate will heighten awareness. Given certain reservations, each training institution values its own brand of teacher training. Why else would they have persisted with it over the long haul into autonomy? Elsewhere, (Fielding, Cavanagh & Widdowson, November 1978) a model of teacher training has been detailed and this is not the place to reiterate the salient points here again. Suffice to state that the operative word is and was "a model". The writer would not be so arrogant as to suggest that **the** teacher training model has been devised. People are aware that teaching is a disjunctive concept and as such there are numerous ways of defining what teaching is as well as that there are numerous teaching styles for us to ponder on. It is little wonder that even in the U.S.A., where most of research on teacher training has been done in its 3000 or so institutions dealing with teacher training, no one model of teacher training has been exalted above the rest. Yet to be sure for a time the mechanised metaphor that gave the world the competency based training programme had its impact on the training movement as did the micro-teaching clinic and for that matter the monitorial system of the 19th century. However, once these methodologies were pushed beyond the originally designated limits, problems of validity began to emerge. Perhaps one of the classic cases of "pushing the paradigm" so to speak was the competency-based-module concept, where it was hoped that upon completion of a number of modules a fully fledged teacher-type would

emerge. That such a hope was forlorn is a matter of record, especially within the affective domain, yet it is still propagated by certain accountability fringe dwellers as a catch all for training. That such a paradigm worked well for certain cognitive acts there can be no doubt and this is not the point at issue. The point at issue is that to adopt any one training paradigm on merger of such diverse institutions is tantamount to denying the existence of different research methodologies capable of dealing with a host of related and different problems and possibilities in teacher training, each with contextual specific solutions.

The approaches to the teacher training paradigms mentioned above point to a much deeper problem needing resolution, should we become serious about teacher training under a merged institutional arena. This problem is to be found in the approach adopted for analysing various component parts of the training programme before, during and after merger.

As recently as the 1979 Presidential Address to the Australian Association for Research in Education the past President, Millicent Poole, (March, 1980) made a plea for the root metaphor for the 1980s to answer research questions to be the contextualist approach. She summarised the position by citing a passage quoted in Manusco 1977:47 which is repeated here as it throws some light on the vexing problem under consideration:

For the contextualist, no analysis is 'the complete analysis'. All analyses eventually 'sheer away' from the event into the more extensive context. This argues that there is no one analysis, no final set of units, no one set of relations, no claim to reducibility, in short, no single and unified account of anything. What makes an analysis good or bad . . . is its appropriateness for our research and science and its utility in our pursuit of understanding and application.

C. S. Lewis (1943:18) put it more succinctly when he stated "to say the shoe fits is to speak not only of the shoes but of the feet." The point to be stressed is that if an institution adopts any of the Pepperian (1942) metaphors that she speaks of, the framework will have been set for decision making and research orientation.

Put it in another way, if one institution had opted for metaphor X prior to merger then it would seem reasonable to use such thinking and research style in making decisions regarding the new context that such an institution of more specifically the training sector of that institution

found itself in. However, and to the point of this section of the paper, during and after such a merger, X might not be necessarily the most educationally desirable metaphor on which to base the answers to such decision questions. Necessarily was chosen quite deliberately since it is realised that on rare occasions philosophical bias does in fact coincide with decisions that are educationally defensible! In order to pursue this metaphor concept a little further an example may be helpful. Suppose that prior to merger institution 'A' saw the answer to questions from within a mechanised metaphor and that institution 'A' wished either through ignorance or bliss to maintain such a stance during merger, certain considerations of an intellectual nature might escape such an institution, e.g., in answer to the question: How are we going to train student teachers in the affective areas now that we are merging with a College of Creative Arts? They might conclude incorrectly that their previously operational metaphor for decisions concerning training in writing on the chalk-board sufficed as the approach to the problem. That such an example is taken from some intellectuals flight into fantasy and as a consequence has no relevance to the real world of higher levels of decision making cannot be denied, but such an example could form the basis to raising the question of what constitutes methodological validity in making decisions in teacher training in newly merged institutions that continue to train teachers?

It is now proposed to turn to particular instances within a training environment so that several of the dimensions of the problems raised so far can be further explored. If the proposition, that practice teaching is prejudicial to a teacher trainee if it is not completed at a particular time within the training component, is accepted then the stage is set for further exploration. First, it is assumed for the sake of analysis that the two merging institutions follow different metaphors prior to merger. Thus one follows an administrative direction metaphor Y, and the other a student developmental metaphor X. It then becomes obvious that either administrative convenience or developmental readiness will form the bases upon which issues regarding, for example, practice teaching will be solved. The argument in this instance appears superficial. However, one not lengthy discussion with student teachers at placement time should convince the ultimate skeptic that such is not the real case. Typically students have very little say in this contrived event. Thus depending on whether metaphor X or metaphor Y is in vogue research questions will be posed differently, e.g., the question as to whether a student is developmentally ready for this thrust into reality, viz practice teaching, is of consequence, only in a metaphor X context. It has

no significance in a metaphor Y context.

Second, numerous significant other people impinge on the neophytes life space during his/her training programme. Prior to merger each institution's students marginally cope with the favoured institution's operational metaphor. On merger, new considerations must be taken into account. The student would need to operate in, for a time an X/Y metaphor context, likewise would staff. The difficulty in such an arrangement comes at evaluation. Students get graded on various outpourings, and anxious moments eventuate in unfamiliar contexts.

Third, the matching of environments (teachers, pupils, administrators, supervisors and administration etc.) to the needs of students in training is of course critical to the success of any training enterprise. In decision, mismatched metaphors and non-familiar contexts during the training programme thus have the potential for dysfunction as different orientations emerge on merger.

The above several issues highlight the surface of contention likely to exist in one portion of a merger complex, the context for decision taking, and thus highlight the reservations necessary concerning mergers for other than good educational sense. To be sure, merging institutions will utter publically that for years prior to Fraser's razors like-minded people were planning just such mergers on educational grounds; but such is the nature of **political** compliance.

The dangers inherent in **not** isolating the various research metaphors for consideration could just be the push needed to "streamline" teacher training in order to achieve a common measure of such conformity as a PhD award for teaching training. Such a movement of course would do violence to the concept of contextual validity and destroy the various pre-merger institutional training paradigms currently in practice. Worse, dominant institutions, on merger, might decide by fiat that their's is **the** training paradigm. The concept of diversity of course must be preserved, given the nature of the incomplete paradigm, the disjunctiveness of the teacher training concept and our own ignorance of the teaching act.

Wynne Harland(October-December 1979) offers some useful comments on the above. She explains briefly the results of a testing programme adopted in a North Carolina school district and I paraphrase the paragraph: Standardised achievement tests were administered to 3rd., 6th.,

10th grade pupils. The results, together with IQ averages were published in the local newspapers. One school did not fair too well – quote: "The principal had introduced a non-traditional maths scheme and explained that 'the school encourages responsibility, self confidence and individuality; and that is what the tests fail to measure'." This principal, as a matter of record, now intends to withdraw the new maths scheme and to return to the traditional one. Harland goes on to say, whether or not that decision was of benefit depends on the merits of the particular scheme involved but it can be argued that, in general, such a process of decision-making would have to ignore many factors relating to the match of methods and materials to pupils, and to teachers and would be unlikely to increase their joy in learning and teaching.

Whilst most of this paper has had an undercurrent of pending doom for educational decision-making it is possible that on merging a new round of intellectual activity could occur within the institutions so affected despite budgetary stupidity and political ignorance of things educational. The combining of X and Y to form Z, or the separation of X and Z or the adoption of X or Y might not be such a backward step, given educational decision-making takes precedence over other forms of

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